

AWARDS LUNCHEON SPEECH
Remarks prepared for
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Thank you for that warm welcome. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to join you here in Houston today. My special thanks to the Greater Houston Partnership for inviting me, and hosting this terrific luncheon. I am especially pleased as I look across the audience - to see so many familiar faces from the community, environmental organizations, local business leaders, and government representatives - local, county and state.

Today marks an important day for all of us who have worked hard to bring about cleaner air for Houston, Galveston and the surrounding area. As the nation celebrates the 31st anniversary of the national 1970 Clean Air Act - the country has seen incredible accomplishments across the nation towards improving air quality for community after community. But as we all know - our job is not done here in Texas.

The 1990 Clean Air Act revisions passed by Congress and signed into law by President George Bush, created specific air quality goals to further help protect public health across the nation. There is no question that on bad air quality days in Houston, Galveston and the surrounding communities, there are times of the day when school children, and our parents and grandparents simply shouldn't be outside because of high levels of air pollution. Let us not ever forget that the national Clean Air Act was passed by Congress to protect public health.

In an effort to meet the ambitious air quality goals set in 1990 by his father, Texas Governor George W. Bush signed this Clean Air Plan on the very day he resigned as Governor in preparation to assume the Office of President of the United States. Now, as President, George Bush has continued to forge ahead by building innovative public-private partnerships to improve and refine the Clean Air plan he submitted last December.

Through the leadership of Governor Rick Perry, the Clean Air Plan has been improved and revised - bringing about additional pollution control measures which have only been recently added.

While no plan is perfect, I have no doubt that this plan will provide an aggressive framework that will make great strides in protecting public health in this community. As a result, later this afternoon - in a press conference with Governor Rick Perry, Congressman Tom Delay, Congressman Ken Bentsen, and Mayor Lee Brown, I will approve the Houston/Galveston State Implementation Plan for clean air.

Any plan will only be successful, however, if all of the parties remain committed over time to implement the measures contained in it – clean air will not result because of the approval of this plan today – today's action marks only the first step toward the goal of providing clean air for Houston and surrounding communities by 2007.

Some critics have asked how this plan will achieve attainment when it relies on future promises by the State to make the final 6 percent of its clean air reductions. The answer is simple. State and local officials have not made merely promises, but have made enforceable commitments – a contract with the people of this region – to institute additional air pollution control measures that will ensure Clean Air Act compliance. These measures must be instituted at specific times and must result in specific

reductions. Some of these measures rely on the development of new technology that therefore places this Plan as the most technically advanced Clean Air Plan ever devised by a State and approved by EPA.

To meet our goal in Texas, a coalition of local leaders which supported Senate Bill 5 and other legislation, such as Mayor Lee Brown, County Judge Robert Eckels, Houston-Galveston Area Council led by Jack Steele, and the Greater Houston Partnership, and the Business Coalition for Clean Air, combined with the input of environmental leaders such as “Smitty” Smith of Public Citizen, and representatives of the organization GHASP, have worked together to assure that the clean air commitments in the Plan will be met. At the State level, the commitment of Chairman “Bob” Huston and Commissioner “Ralph” Marquez of the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission, in partnership with EPA,

Texas Senate Bill 5, or the Texas Emission Reduction Plan, creates economic incentives to encourage Texans to reduce air pollution and establishes a statewide Emissions Reduction Fund. This legislation has incredible potential for reducing air pollution and ensuring clean air in

Texas. Senate Bill 5 is sure to become a national model for incorporating economic incentives into clean air planning.

The passage of SB5, which was signed into law by Governor Rick Perry, is the first time in history that EPA has given credit for an economic incentive package instead of relying on additional rules requiring compliance.

Earlier this year, we were honored to recognize the airline, railroad and tug boat industries for signing voluntary agreements with Texas and EPA to reduce pollution from their operations, also indicating the unprecedented partnership with industry to address air pollution challenges.

Today's luncheon is another celebration - it continues to show us how partnerships can, and do work. Together our coalition of local and state government, environmental advocates, industry proponents and community leaders have worked to assure that clean air commitments in the Houston/Galveston Clean Air Plan will be met. Senate Bill 5, combined with the technology forcing measures contained in the Plan, will

make possible cleaner air, not only in Houston, but Dallas-Ft. Worth metroplex, San Antonio and Austin. In fact, I predict that aspects of this Plan will be used across the country as a cost-effective blueprint to meeting Clean Air Act goals.

While the Clean Air Plan itself is remarkable, we are here today to recognize the individuals and the groups they represent for their remarkable effort in putting aside their respective interests to work toward the common goal of improved public health in their community by passing Senate Bill 5.

Now - It is with great pleasure that I present the on behalf of President George Bush and EPA Administrator Christie Whitman, these Environmental Excellence awards for their outstanding commitment for improving air quality in Houston by passing Senate Bill 5 to:

State Senator J. E. "Buster" Brown of Lake Jackson, was the prominent architect of Senate Bill 5 in the Texas Senate. Work on this legislation began almost 2 years ago, as Senator Brown realized that better, more cost effective alternates to cleaning the air had to be faced.

State Representative Warren Chisum of Pampa, who chairs the

House Committee on Environmental Regulation, was also a co-leader in developing not only Senate Bill 5, but other legislation focusing on cleaning up older cars in Texas.

State Representative Steve Wolens of Dallas, who chairs the House State Affairs Committee and who sponsored the bill in the Texas House, was an invaluable ally in the House without which his legislation would not have been approved.

Texas Clean Air Working Group Co-Chairs, George W. Beatty, Jr., and Collin County Judge Ron Harris. Both of these individuals have been tireless in their support for cleaner air. As Judge Harris presence indicates, the work we recognize today will have impacts all across Texas.

Greater Houston Partnership Board Environment Chairman Kelly Frels and Business Coalition for Clean Air Chairman Charles Duncan. These two groups demonstrated th broad base support for cleaning the air in the business community.

Houston-Galveston Area Council, Executive Director, Jack Steele, for their efforts in coordinating pollution reduction initiatives. Their role both in assisting in Senate Bill 5 and in the transportation arena will be

crucial in seeing that this Plan attains its vision.

Harris County Judge Robert Eckels, as Chairman of the Transportation Policy Committee of the Houston-Galveston Area Council, was invaluable in helping to solving transportation challenges in the Plan.

Houston Mayor Lee P. Brown, was an early proponent of the bill. Among all of the Mayors I have ever seen, he understood that cleaning the air was a priority not only for public health of this region, but the economic health of this community.

Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission Chairman Robert “Bob” J. Huston and Commissioner R. B. “Ralph” Marquez. Remember, this is their Plan that I am approving here today. But this award is specifically for their work, as partners, in ensuring the passage of Senate Bill 5.

Texas office of Public Citizen, Tom “Smitty” Smith, Director, for his role as a principal architect of Senate Bill 5 and all his work to ensure the participation of citizens and community organizations in the process.

In closing - to achieve the Plan's goal, every sector of the community must do their part or this plan will not succeed in cleaning the air in the Houston and Galveston areas.

The industrial community, led by the Greater Houston Partnership and the Business Coalition for Clean Air, must continue to work in refining its proposals to reduce Nitrogen Oxides reductions contained in the plan - and in developing enforceable and verifiable pollution control measures for reductions of Volatile Organic Compounds. The TNRCC and EPA will work with industry to refine the Plan once any proposed changes demonstrate they will improve public health.

The Houston-Galveston Area Council must continue to show leadership, through Judge Robert Eckels, Jack Steele, and others, to ensure the transportation needs of Houston are met without making air pollution and urban sprawl worse. Along with citizen groups such as GHASP, they must insure that the voluntary measures contained in the SIP are implemented.

The airline, railroad and tug boat industries must remain committed to implementing the unique voluntary agreements that will greatly reduce

the amount of contaminants in the air.

The Texas legislature must continue to show their leadership by supporting TNRCC as it develops new and innovative measures and remain committed to ensure that SB5 is properly implemented and funded.

The TNRCC will continue to face many challenges in implementation of this Plan. I am sure that the leadership of TNRCC will remain committed to the partnership with local leaders and the EPA to ensure that the various mile-posts toward Clean Air Act compliance are achieved.

The news media must continue to highlight the success of innovations that reduce air pollution and assure that this struggle does not retreat into the background of public consciousness.

Our job for achieving clean air is not done here in Texas. In order for this Plan to result in cleaner air, everyone - each of us - must remain committed to implementing every aspect of this Plan so that one day there will be no more “red level” ozone alerts when our children cannot play outside. Thank you.